

WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM

Overview

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program that encourages creation of high quality wildlife habitats to support wildlife populations of national, state, tribal, and local significance.

Through WHIP, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial assistance to landowners and others to develop upland, wetland, riparian, and aquatic habitat areas on their property. WHIP is reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill).

Through WHIP, NRCS works with private landowners and operators; conservation districts; and federal, state, and tribal agencies to develop wildlife habitat on their property. Funding for WHIP comes from the Commodity Credit Corporation.

Benefits

Since WHIP began in 1998, approximately 11,000 participants have enrolled more than 1.6 million acres into the program. Most efforts have concentrated on improving upland wildlife habitat, such as native prairie, but there is an increasing emphasis on improving riparian and aquatic areas.

The 2002 Farm Bill greatly expands the available tools for improving wildlife habitat conditions across the nation.

Species that have benefited from WHIP activities include the grasshopper sparrow, bobwhite quail, swift fox, short-eared owl, Karner-blue butterfly, gopher tortoise, Louisiana black bear, Eastern collared lizard, Bachman's sparrow, ovenbird, and acorn woodpecker.

How WHIP Works

Conservation districts convene local work groups to identify local wildlife habitat priorities. The local work groups then provide input to the state technical committee that advises the state conservationist in the development of a state WHIP plan.

The state WHIP plan serves as a guide for the

development of the state WHIP ranking criteria.

Persons interested in entering into a cost-share agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to develop wildlife habitat may file an application at any time. Participants voluntarily limit future use of their land for a period of time, but retain private ownership.

NRCS works with the participant to develop a wildlife habitat development plan. This plan becomes the basis of the cost-share agreement between NRCS and the participant. NRCS provides cost-share payments to landowners under these agreements that are usually 5 to 10 years in duration, depending upon the practices to be installed.

There are shorter-term agreements to install practices needed to meet wildlife emergencies, as approved by the NRCS state conservationist. NRCS also provides greater cost-share assistance to landowners who enter into agreements of 15 years or more for practices on essential plant and animal habitat. NRCS can use up to 15 percent of its available WHIP funds for this purpose.

NRCS does not place limits on the number of acres that can be enrolled in the program or the amount of payment made; however, some states may choose to establish such requirements. NRCS welcomes projects that provide valuable wildlife habitat and does not want to discourage any landowner who desires to implement practices to improve habitat conditions for declining species.

NRCS continues to provide assistance to landowners after completion of habitat development activities. This assistance may be in the form of monitoring habitat practices, reviewing management guidelines, or providing basic biological and engineering advice on how to achieve optimum results for targeted species.

eGov

Applications are accepted through a continuous sign-up process. Applications may be obtained and

filed at any time with the local USDA service center or conservation district office.

Applications may also be obtained through USDA's e-gov Internet site at: www.sc.egov.usda.gov.

- Enter "Natural Resources Conservation Service" in the Agency field;
- Enter "Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program" in the Program Name field; and
- Enter "CCC-1250" in the Form Number field.

Applications also may be accepted by cooperating conservation partners approved or designated by NRCS.

Eligibility

Eligible lands under the program are:

- Privately owned land;
- Federal land when the primary benefit is on private or tribal land;
- State and local government land on a limited basis; and
- Tribal land.

If land is determined eligible, NRCS places emphasis on enrolling:

- Habitat areas for wildlife species experiencing

declining or significantly reduced populations;

- Practices beneficial to fish and wildlife that may not otherwise be funded; and
- Wildlife and fishery habitats identified by local and state partners and Indian tribes in each state.

For More Information

If you need more information about WHIP, please contact your local USDA service center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, or your local conservation district. Information is also available on the Internet at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/.

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